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ABSTRACT

The possibility of using measures of ways of coping to predict career advancement activities was examined in a study of 104 undergraduate students (69% were Caucasian, 19% were Asian-American, 9% were Latina/Latino, and 46% were male) enrolled in a career planning course at a large southwestern university. The students completed the 50-item Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ) and a new 16-item questionnaire called the Career Advancement Activities Scale that was designed to measure action-oriented career planning activities. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used with the eight separate scale scores from the WCQ as the predictor variables and the overall score of the Career Advancement Activities Scale as the criterion variable. The final regression model included three of the eight predictor variables and was statistically significant. Three coping scales proved to be significant predictors of higher levels of career exploration activities: painful problem solving; accepting responsibility; and confrontive coping. According to the Pearson's "r" correlations calculated for the predictor and criterion variables, more than 28% of the variance in career advancement activity was accounted for by problem solving, accepting responsibility, and confrontive coping strategies. (Contains 15 references and the Career Advancement Activities Scale.) (MN)

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ED 410 400

Coping and Career Advancement Activities

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Abstract

Research has identified two major ways of coping: active (problem-focused) and passive (emotion-focused). This study replicates a previous study by the authors that found an active coping style to be a significant predictor of career planning activity by undergraduate students. Participants completed two questionnaires: the Ways of Coping Questionnaire and the Career Advancement Activities Scale. Stepwise multiple regression analysis found three coping scales representing both active and passive styles of coping to be significant predictors of career planning activity. The results suggest that a balance of the two styles of coping may have a strong relationship to career advancement activity.

Coping and Career Advancement Activities

There is ample research to link occupational stress to psychological and behavioral outcomes (Long, Kahn, & Schutz, 1992). However, stress is not only linked to specific workplace demands, but to other aspects of vocational development such as career exploration; unfortunately, research in this area is much more scarce (Metheny, Aycock, Pugh, Curlette, & Cannella, 1986). Previous models of career decision-making have focused mainly on the rational aspects of occupational choice and not on understanding how to develop personal resources to cope not only with choosing one's next job but also how one's career activities are related to personal styles of coping and handling life demands (Miller, 1995). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the relationship between career advancement activities and coping strategies.

Models of career development have progressed from a somewhat narrow focus on job choice and the performance of occupational tasks to concern with the attitudes and knowledge involved in choosing, learning, and using job related skills -- what Herr and Lear (1984) have described as general employability. Hansen (1981) described this shift in the goals of career guidance as the need to move from a focus strictly on jobs to a focus on life patterns and from occupational choice alone to focusing on the larger sphere of people's lives in the interface of the vocational and personal.

Similarly, research on stress has evolved from the somewhat narrow perspective that it is the accumulation of various unpleasant life events (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) to current models of stress which emphasize the importance of subjective evaluations in determining whether or not demands will be experienced as stressors. Transactional models of stress assume that when a potentially threatening event is encountered, a reflexive, cognitive balancing act ensues in which the perceived demands of the event are

weighed against one's perceived capabilities for dealing with it. Instances in which the estimated demands exceed one's resources are presumed to result in the stress response, which includes behavioral, emotional, and psychological components.

The matter is made more complex by the fact that the construct of coping is not monolithic. Varied definitions of coping processes exist and probably reflect the varied ways in which individuals attempt to deal with a given stressor (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Coping refers to the effort a person expends, both cognitively and behaviorally, to manage life demands. Coping has two major functions: to change the demands of the stressful situation (problem-focused coping) and to regulate stressful feelings associated with an event (emotion-focused coping) (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986).

Folkman and Lazarus (1988) have identified two major ways of coping: active, instrumental attempts to alter one's environment, and passive, internally directed attempts to alter one's reaction to the environment. Folkman, et al. (1986) developed the Ways of Coping scale to measure both types of coping with eight subscales: Confrontive Coping, Distancing, Self-Controlling, Seeking Social Support, Accepting Responsibility, Escape-Avoidance, Planful Problem-Solving, and Positive Reappraisal. Yerly, McCarthy & Murff (1997) used the Ways of Coping scale to predict career advancement activities and found that among undergraduates taking a career planning class, the Planful Problem Solving scale representing an active style of coping was a significant predictor of career planning activities. Although this result appeared to support traditional models of career development which tend to primarily focus on problem-solving (Manuele-Adkins, 1992), the authors were unable to draw specific conclusions from the results because all eight Ways of Coping scales were positively correlated with career planning activity and a

significant predictor may in part have been due to error variance in the sample. The current study was therefore designed to replicate the previous study in an effort to identify more reliable results which may be of use to career specialists. The specific research questions were: 1) whether measures of ways of coping could be used to predict career advancement activities, and 2) the relative importance of each variable to overall levels of career advancement activities.

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 104 undergraduate students at a large southwestern university enrolled in a career planning course. The participants were 69% Caucasian, 19% Asian-American, and 9% Latina/Latino with the rest representing other groups, and were 46% male and 54% female.

Measures

Participants completed two questionnaires in this study which are described below. Before completing these measures, participants were asked to indicate which one of the following career activities were perceived to be the most important at that time. The choices were applying to graduate school (29%), securing an internship (21%), finding a paid job in the near future (42%), and other (8%). These choices were selected by the authors because they represented over 90% of the responses given in the previous study when participants were allowed to give an open-ended response to the question.

Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ). Participants were asked to indicate how they coped or were coping with the previously identified activity using a revised version of the 50-item Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ). The WCQ was originally developed by Folkman & Lazarus (1985) and revised by Folkman, et al. (1986) to assess strategies

people use to cope with stressful life events. Items on the Ways of Coping Questionnaire fall into one of eight coping scales: Confrontive Coping describes aggressive efforts to alter the situation and also suggests a degree of hostility and risk-taking (6 items); Distancing describes efforts to detach oneself (6 items); Self-Controlling describes efforts to regulate one's own feelings and actions (7 items); Seeking Social Support describes efforts to seek informational, tangible, and emotional support (6 items); Accepting Responsibility acknowledges one's own role in the problem with a concomitant theme of trying to put things right (4 items); Escape-Avoidance describes wishful thinking and behavioral efforts to escape or avoid (8 items); Planful Problem-Solving describes deliberate problem-focused efforts to alter the situation coupled with an analytic approach to solving the problem (6 items); and Positive Reappraisal describes efforts to create positive meaning by focusing on personal growth (7 items). A 4-point Likert scale was used (0 = does not apply and/or not at all; 1 = used somewhat; 2 = used quite a bit; 3 = used a great deal) for participants to respond to each item. Scores were calculated by summing the ratings for each scale separately.

Items on the WCQ were analyzed by Folkman, et al. (1986) using factor analysis which resulted in the eight scales. The alpha coefficients for each of the scales were Confrontive Coping, .70; Distancing, .61; Self-Controlling, .70; Seeking Social Support, .76; Accepting Responsibility, .66; Escape-Avoidance, .72; Planful Problem-Solving, .68; and Positive Reappraisal, .79. Test-retest reliability is difficult to assess with this type of instrument because coping responses can change over time given a different contextual situation. It is also possible that the cumulative effect of previous coping attempts may also affect the instrument's reliability. Items on the WCQ were originally developed in accordance with a theoretical model (Lazarus & Launier, 1978) and construct validity is

supported by the results of studies in accordance with Folkman, et al.'s (1986) theoretical predictions.

Career Advancement Activities Scale (CAAS). Participants also completed an instrument developed by the authors to measure action-oriented career planning activities. The initial list of items was compiled from a review of the content of textbooks used for university career planning courses. Final items on the scale were chosen to reflect the content of the career planning course from which the participants were drawn. The final content of the list was judged to be those items that were significantly action-oriented in relation to career planning. These activities require some initiation on the part of the student. Items had to reflect a proactive philosophy as well as a personal responsibility orientation. High scores on these items would indicate that the individual is taking personal responsibility for his or her career planning and is not only thinking about it but taking actions on his or her own behalf. Items selected were determined to have high face validity and were relevant to an individual actively pursuing a career search.

The instrument included 16 items which asked participants to identify, using a 4-point Likert scale (0 = does not apply and/or not at all; 1 = used somewhat; 2 = used quite a bit; 3 = used a great deal) to what extent they used or were using a specific activity in the situation they described at the beginning of the survey. An overall score was calculated by summing item responses. The item stem for each question began with "To cope with the career situation I identified previously, I used or am using the following activity:" An example of an item is "expanding my network by meeting new people in field of interest." Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was .83. A complete copy of the CAAS is included in the appendix.

Results

Table 1 contains the descriptive statistics for the variables used in this study.

Insert Table 1 Here

As can be seen in Table 1, the mean for the Planful Problem-Solving Scale on the WCQ was higher than for any other scale. The standard deviations of the WCQ scales in general indicated a good degree of variability. Finally, the mean for the CAAS was 1.94 out of a possible 3, indicating most participants considered themselves to be fairly active in career advancement activities.

Table 2 contains the correlations between all of the variables used in this study.

Insert Table 2 Here

As reported by Folkman et al. (1986), scales on the WCQ are significantly correlated.

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used with the eight separate scale scores from the Ways of Coping Questionnaire as the predictor variables and the overall score of the Career Advancement Activities Scale as the criterion variable. Tabachnick and Fidell (1986) recommended the use of stepwise multiple regression when the goal is developing a set of independent variables that is useful in predicting the dependent variable and when the relative ordering of independent variables cannot be established a priori. The alpha level used to include and exclude variables for each step of the model was .05.

The final regression model included three of the eight predictor variables and was statistically significant ($F(3,95=12.605)$, $p<.0001$). The three coping scales which

significantly predicted the use of activities to advance one's career were, in order of the absolute value of their standardized regression coefficients, Planful Problem-Solving (Beta = .41), Accepting Responsibility (Beta = -.28), and Confrontive Coping (Beta = .22). To determine whether the direction of the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables was the same at the univariate level, Pearson's r correlations were calculated and are reported in Table 2; Planful Problem Solving was $r = .48$, $p < .001$, Accepting Responsibility was $r = -.13$, $p = .21$, and Confrontive Coping was $r = .26$, $p = .009$. The multiple R for the model was .53, indicating that over 28% of the variance in career advancement activity was accounted for by problem-solving, accepting responsibility, and confrontive coping strategies. The five other scales did not contribute significantly to the final regression model.

Discussion

The results of this study suggested that three particular styles of coping significantly predicted higher levels of career exploration activities. As found in the previous study, Planful Problem-Solving was a significant predictor of career planning activity. Another type of active coping, Confrontive Coping, was also a significant predictor. Additionally, we found a significant negative relationship between Accepting Responsibility and career advancement activities which may reflect a passive style of coping. These results concur with the stress and coping literature which suggest that both problem-focused coping and more passive, emotion-focused coping have been shown to be effective in managing stress (Folkman, et al., 1986).

Several limitations of the present study should be noted. First, the CAAS was developed by the authors for this study and although its internal reliability in both studies seemed adequate, further tests of its validity and reliability would be necessary to evaluate

whether it measures the construct intended. Second, the sample was limited in this study and therefore should not be generalized to other groups.

Hansen (1981) and Herr and Lear (1984) have proposed that vocational development is a complex process involving both personal and task-specific activities and we believe the results of this study support their view. While an emphasis on active strategies such as planful problem-solving fits with traditional approaches to career development, to help individuals make the most of their personal resources in making appropriate vocational decisions it may be necessary to consider the complex ways in which individuals interact with their environment, which at times may include counterintuitive processes such as denying responsibility. The results may suggest that a balance of active coping strategies and passive strategies have a strong relationship to career advancement activities and seem to support Wrenn's (1988) suggestion that career development activities must consider persons as dynamic wholes composed of many interacting dimensions which are reflected in their efforts to cope. Further studies may help clarify the full range of coping strategies used in the career development process.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ) and the Career Advancement Activities Scale

	Mean	*SD*	*Range*
WCQ Scales:			
Confrontive Coping	1.28	0.50	0.00-2.50
Distancing	1.24	0.57	0.17-2.50
Self-Controlling	1.69	0.46	0.29-2.43
Seeking Social Support	1.84	0.54	0.33-3.00
Accepting Responsibility	1.39	0.67	0.00-3.00
Escape-Avoidance	1.02	0.53	0.00-2.38
Planful Problem-Solving	2.00	0.53	0.33-3.00
Positive Reappraisal	1.79	0.53	0.57-2.86
Career Advancement Activities Scale	1.94	0.53	0.44-3.00

Table 2

Ways of Coping Questionnaire and Career Advancement Activities Scale: Intercorrelations

	CONF	DIST	SELF	SUPP	RESP	ESC	PLAN	REAP	CAAS
CONF	--------								
DIST	.59	--------							
SELF	.49	.49	--------						
SUPP	.44	.28	.36	--------					
RESP	.46	.53	.44	.20	--------				
ESC	.37	.59	.40	.07	.54	--------			
PLAN	.36	.11	.41	.51	.11	-.02	--------		
REAP	.30	.22	.52	.53	.27	.20	.64	--------	
CAAS	.26	.06	.24	.30	-.13	-.08	.48	.38	--------

All values above .19 are significant at $p < .05$ and all values above .31 are significant at $p < .001$.

Note: CONF = Confrontive Coping scale from Ways of Coping Questionnairre (WCQ); DIST = Distancing scale from WCQ; SELF = Self-Controlling scale from WCQ; SUPP = Seeking Social Support scale from WCQ; RESP = Accepting Responsibility scale from WCQ; ESC = Escape-Avoidance scale from WCQ; PLAN = Planful Problem-Solving scale from WCQ; REAP = Positive Reappraisal scale from WCQ; CAAS = Career Advancement Activities Scale.

Appendix

Career Advancement Activities Scale

Directions: Please read each item below and indicate, by circling the appropriate number, to what extent you have used or are using each activity in the situation you identified at the beginning of the survey.

0 = does not apply and/or not at all
1 = used somewhat
2 = used quite a bit
3 = used a great deal

To cope with the career situation identified previously, I used or am using the following activity:

	Not at All			A Great Deal
1. Reading about several interesting options.	0	1	2	3
2. Listening to presentations in field of interest.	0	1	2	3
3. Talking with students who are further along in the career field I am considering.	0	1	2	3
4. Making a tentative decision about a career field.	0	1	2	3
5. Obtaining a part-time job in field of interest.	0	1	2	3
6. Doing temporary work in field of interest.	0	1	2	3
7. Obtaining an internship in field of interest.	0	1	2	3
8. Researching trends in field of interest.	0	1	2	3
9. Analyzing my own personal network for contacts in field of interest.	0	1	2	3
10. Expanding my network by meeting new people in field of interest.	0	1	2	3
11. Researching a career by talking with professionals in that field.	0	1	2	3
12. Writing a resume highlighting my strengths as a potential applicant in that field.	0	1	2	3

	Not at All			A Great Deal
13. Memorizing a short "verbal resume" highlighting my qualifications in less than two minutes.	0	1	2	3
14. Researching an employer of interest well enough to know its needs.	0	1	2	3
15. Writing a proposal to an employer of interest outlining how I can help meet their needs.	0	1	2	3
16. Interviewing for positions in my field of interest.	0	1	2	3